



Dominica

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 291 square miles, and its population is approximately 70,000. Christianity is the dominant religion, and the Roman Catholic faith claims approximately 61 percent of the population. In recent years, many individuals have joined evangelical churches. According to the 2001 Population and Housing Census, followers of evangelical churches represent 18 percent of the population. Seventh-day Adventists and Methodists represent the next largest denominations, accounting for 6 percent and 3.7 percent of the population respectively.

Followers of minority religions and denominations, which range in number from 1.6 percent to 0.2 percent of the population, include Rastafarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Anglicans, and Muslims. According to the census, 1.4 percent of the population adheres to "other" religions--including Baptist, Nazarene, Church of Christ, Brethren Christian, and the Baha'i Faith--and 6 percent of the population has no religion. The Muslim community, which consists mostly of foreign students at the Ross Medical School, financed the 2004 construction of a mosque in Portsmouth.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship; however, the Government maintains a close relationship with the Christian churches. Christian holy days, such as Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays. In addition, during the period covered by this report, the Government declared National Repentance and Dedication Day as a new public holiday to be celebrated annually on April 8. The holiday was proposed by the Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches and accepted by the Government, which recognized "the need for a certain level of spiritual consciousness among Dominicans and of the need to work and pray together for Dominica's prosperity."

The public school curriculum includes Christian education, and students are led in prayer during morning assembly. Non-Christian students are not required to participate. There are Catholic, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist schools, and the Government subsidizes teachers' salaries at religiously affiliated schools.

All religious organizations are required to register with the Government. Organizations must register their buildings through an application to the government registrar, and they then must register as nonprofit organizations with the Attorney General. Nonprofit status is outlined in the Companies Act 21 of 1994. Any organization denied permission to register by the Attorney General has the right to apply for judicial review.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In one instance, a Mormon church claimed to have applied for permission in 2003 to operate and proselytize; however, the request had not been approved by the Attorney General's office. Such recognition affects a church's status as a nonprofit organization, its ability to hold public meetings, and the work status of the church's missionaries. The church has pursued the matter through legal channels; however, there was no conclusion by the end of the period covered by this report. According to the church's law firm, the church wrote letters on the matter and met with the Attorney General in April 2004, seeking to rebut unfavorable reports concerning the church that the Attorney General had received from outside sources, including the police. The petition was being reviewed by the new Attorney General, who was appointed in May 2005. The law firm representing the church group expected that permission would be granted for the group to operate in the country.

Adherents of the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, was illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor United States citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Dominica Christian Council and the Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches conduct activities to promote peace, greater mutual understanding, and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with local groups and other organizations.

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